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CRITERIA FOR SELECTING MATERIALS TO TEACH READING.

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BEFORE SELECTING MATERIALS TO TEACH READING, A SET OF CONSISTENT AND APPROPRIATE CRITERIA MUST BE DEVISED AND USED TO OBJECTIVELY ANALYZE AVAILABLE MATERIALS. A KNOWLEDGE OF THE CHILDREN, TEACHERS, AND OBJECTIVES AND PATTERN OF THE READING PROGRAM IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AIDS THE DETERMINATION OF THE CRITERIA. JUDGMENT MUST THEN BE USED IN SELECTION BECAUSE MATERIALS WILL RARELY FIT ALL THE CHOSEN CRITERIA, AND PRIORITY MUST BE GIVEN TO SOME OF THEM. THERE ARE LITTLE KNOWN CRITERIA WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED--(1) A PROVISION FOR CONTROLLING GRAPHEME-PHONEME CORRESPONDENCE, (2) RECOGNITION OF DIALECT DIFFERENCES, AND (3) AN ATTEMPT TO STIMULATE CHILDREN TO READ WIDELY OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL. CONTRADICTORY CRITERIA WHICH SHOULD BE AVOIDED INCLUDE--(1) GAINING MEANING VERSUS LEANING GRAPHEME-PHONEME RELATIONSHIP AND (2) CONTROLLED VOCABULARY VERSUS LITERARY QUALITY. (RH)

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RE 000 183

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CRITERIA FOR SELECTING MATERIALS TO TEACH READING

Elementary Section,

Sequence IV. Selection and Evaluation of Materials

Everyone agrees that materials of one sort or another are needed in the reading program of the school. This need is evident to professionals and laymen alike. Obviously children can neither learn to read nor refine their reading skills without something to read.

Despite the wide recognition that materials are indispensable in teaching reading, a fundamental problem remains: which of the available materials are most appropriate and effective. This problem has long plagued classroom teachers, school administrators, and reading specialists, and is growing more acute.

Several types of materials have been on the market for some time and new forms appear with increasing frequency. Among the former are basal series, supplementary readers, trade books, workbooks, review materials, tests, charts, filmstrips, and teachers' guides. Two of the newer forms are reading laboratories and programed materials. Each type of reading material is designed to assist teachers achieve certain instructional goals. Some purport to provide a total reading program, others are less inclusive.

The Pressure of the Present

A tremendous number of reading materials are now on the market. New ones come to our attention almost daily. Older ones are revised and refined; seldom are they discontinued. Increased attention to education, including the availability of Federal funds has helped to promote this deluge of materials. There appears to be no slackening in this trend; if anything it promises to continue at an accelerating rate.

Several other factors compound the problem of teachers, administrators, and reading specialists. One of these is the rather marked similarities of materials within types listed earlier. Even when new and different approaches appear within one or another type, a movement of accommodation begins. The older, established materials are revised to include the new approaches and/or advertising materials and teachers' guides are developed to show how the publicized innovation always has been or is now an integral part of the older materials. Successive revisions of the new materials tend to modify them in the direction of the older materials and a new synthesis is reached.

Publishers' representatives, promotional literature, and samples of materials compound the problem. We are battered by a barrage of words, pictures, and examples designed to demonstrate and support claims of superiority for each of the materials. This continuous flood of advertising extolling the special characteristics and strengths of materials to teach reading is replete with statements such as "the most complete program", "the most widely used", "modern materials", and "the most recent thing".

Each of the materials on the market reflects more or less accurately a particular concept of what the instructional program in reading ought to be. New knowledge about reading, learning, society, language, literature and instructional technology results in changing emphases in the reading programs advocated by various authorities and publishers. The new knowledge

thus leads directly to the rash of new materials as well as the revision of the older ones.

Criteria and Analysis of Materials

These factors taken together make the selection of appropriate materials a difficult and time consuming task. Many lists of criteria have been developed to assist selectors in their work. Some lists are quite extensive, others more limited. Each list, however, mirrors the biases and preferences of the person or group who developed it. This fact accounts for the differences among the lists. Those who elect to use an available list "buy" the point of view of the compiler. Not all selectors, however, find an orientation or philosophy that is acceptable to them in criteria developed by someone else. Many believe they must devise their own set of criteria. In either case, one or more criteria are basic to the selection process.

These criteria may not be fully spelled out or consciously applied but they are used nevertheless. Numerous criteria may be employed or only a few, perhaps only one. Each criterion is a principle accepted by the selector. It serves as a standard against which to measure materials and provides a basis for analyzing them. The first task of a selector, then, is to bring together a comprehensive set of criteria. The second is to use these criteria consciously to objectively analyze available materials. It is only after the principles have been assembled in a list of criteria and the materials analyzed that selection should take place. Major emphasis must be placed on the first two steps. The third follows naturally.

This means that those responsible for choosing new materials must be analysts first and selectors second. The list of principles they have

assembled determines what they look for in their examination and to some extent how they conduct their examination. Analysts must identify the strengths and weaknesses of the materials and their suitability for specific situations. All of this points up the fact that selection itself is much less involved and difficult than developing a comprehensive, consistent set of criteria and then using them to analyze the available materials.

Analysts of reading materials have at their disposal far more principles than they can use. They will be swamped by sheer numbers if they attempt to use all possible principles. In addition, some principles conflict with others. Thus, choices have to be made among principles. The goal is a complete, coherent framework for analyzing materials.

Developing Criteria for Specific Situations

Knowledge of three elements in the situation in which the materials will be used help the analyst determine what is essential, what is inconsequential, and what is unacceptable in available materials. These elements are the children, the teachers, and the reading program. Certainly the materials should be appropriate to the needs, interest, and backgrounds of the children for whom they are selected. Materials should also be compatable with the preparation, experience, and preferences of the teachers who will be directing children in their use. The objectives and pattern of the reading program in the school building or system should be reflected in the materials. If the analyst has accurate knowledge of these three elements in his own school situation, his analysis is likely to identify the most suitable materials.

Analysts will almost always use several criteria to guide their examination of materials. The materials are measured against these standards. The validity of the materials is established by this measurement. It is logical to select the materials closest to the norm created by these standards or criteria.

Rarely will materials exactly fit the norm. It is improbable that any materials give these principles exactly the same emphasis as did the analyst who compiled them. For example one set of basal readers may include many colorful pictures. This fits one criterion. However, phonics is not stressed in the readers. Since a strong emphasis on phonics is another criterion, this set of readers does not fit the norm perfectly. Obviously certain principles that support some materials may not be included among the criteria accepted by an analyst; conversely, an analyst may have included a specific criterion not basic to some materials.

The fact that several criteria must be considered means that those who prepare and those who use materials for reading instruction are forced to establish priorities among the criteria they select. They must decide what they want most, what is less important to them, and what they do not want. Seldom will analysts or authors agree completely on a list of criteria or the priority assigned them. This means that except in rare instances most analysts will not be completely satisfied with any materials. They must decide which of the available materials most nearly meets the norm they have established.

Criteria for Special Consideration

Four of us at Wayne State University recently identified and made available in a book more than two hundred principles that analysts might

use as criteria*. We learned several interesting things in the course of our work. First, there are far more principles that might be selected than can be used easily or advantageously. We also learned that a great many of the more than two hundred principles are seldom used as criteria either because they are not widely known or because they are not compatable with dominant current thinking about reading. Another thing that came to our attention is how often contradictory principles are found in working lists of criteria. Perhaps the most surprising thing is the frequency with which unstated, even unrecognized principles lip into the framework of criteria. In this latter category the criterion of lowest cost often may be found.

Giving attention to two groups of principles may be especially profitable for all who are responsible for selecting reading materials. The first of these groups consists of those principles that are obscure and, therefore, seldom used. Many of these would probably be used more often as criteria if analysts knew about them. The second group of principles is made up of those that are contradictory. These must be so recognized by analysts and require a choice between them. They cannot be used together.

Little Known Criteria

Lack of familiarity with seldom used principles dooms them to obscurity. A primary task of all analysts is to acquaint themselves with all possible principles. The work of the four of us from Wayne State was an attempt to provide some assistance. Here are some questions that embody representative examples of little known principles that we

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*Goodman, Kenneth S; Olsen, Hans C., Jr.; Colvin, Cynthia N.; and VanderLinde, Louis F., Choosing Materials to Teach Reading. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966.

identified.

What provision is made for controlling grapheme-phoneme (symbol-sound) correspondence?

Some materials rigorously control their relationship. Others give no attention to it. This should not be confused with a formal, systematic phonics program. Perhaps the most widely known attempt to maintain a consistent grapheme-phoneme relationship is the Initial Teaching Alphabet.

Is there a recognition of and provision for dialect differences in the materials?

Students of language point out that marked differences exist in the way in which language is used by various groups of people in the United States. Many dialects exist. Provision for dialect differences is now evident in some materials. Most of the available materials, however, give little consideration to this principle.

Do the materials contain deliberate attempts to stimulate children to read widely outside of school?

Relatively few materials designed for the reading program in early grades present such guides for children. Yet wide individual reading is a stated goal for most reading programs.

Contradictory Criteria

Analysts must steer clear of the tangle caused by choosing conflicting, contradictory principles when they compile criteria to guide their examination of reading materials. The task of analyzing materials takes enough time, effort, and patience without compounding the difficulty by including opposing criteria. The contradictions must be identified and resolved before the norm is established. Here are two examples of

conflicting principles that illustrate the choices analysts must often make.

Children should always gain meaning from materials used for reading instruction. This principle underlies most basal series today. Other reading materials, such as some with a linguistic base, emphasize a conflicting principle: the early stage of the reading program should concentrate on helping children learn the grapheme-phoneme relationship. Meaning is unimportant, even detrimental to acquiring this basic knowledge. These principles are difficult to reconcile.

Reading materials should have a carefully controlled vocabulary. Materials based on this principle present a limited number of words. They are repeated many times to assist children in building a large stock of sight words. A contradictory principle is that the content of reading materials should be of high literary quality. They should consist of selections that have stood the test of time; those which excite the imagination and touch the emotions. These two principles are clearly incompatable.

Conclusion

Selecting suitable reading materials can be a bewildering task. Great numbers of available materials and conflicting advertising claims make it difficult to choose among them. Selectors need some basis for analyzing and comparing materials. Deliberately chosen, consciously applied criteria serve that purpose.

Selectors of reading materials have, therefore, a three fold responsibility. First, they must carefully devise a comprehensive, consistent set of appropriate criteria. Then they must objectively analyze

available materials and measure them against this norm. After that they simply select the materials that fit the norm most closely. This process sounds easy. It is not. However, selectors who carefully and wisely spell out the criteria they will use to guide their analysis of materials can proceed with confidence and dispatch.